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TELEGRAM

July 18, 2004

To: No Action Addressee
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From: AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI (ABU DHABI 2382 - ROUTINE)
TAGS: PGOV, KDEM
Captions: None
Subject: UAE 'S STANDVIEW ON DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMENUAE
WOMAN SCHOLAR SPEAKS UP
Ref: None

UNCLAS ABU DHABI 02382

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CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: CDA:RALLBRIGHT
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 002382

SIPDIS

STATE FOR DRL, NEA/PI, AND NEA/ARP, AND NEA/PPD

E.O. 12958: DECL: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KWMN](#) [TC](#)
SUBJECT: UAE 'S STANDVIEW ON DISCRIMINATION AGAINST
WOMENUAE WOMAN SCHOLAR SPEAKS UP

1. THE MFA'S EMIRATES INSTITUTE OF DIPLOMACY, HOSTED
DR. FATEMA'S AL-SAYEGH, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AND
CHAIRMAN OF THE HISTORY DEPARTMENT IN THE COLLEGE OF
HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES AT UAE UNIVERSITY, FOR A
SESSION , JULY 3-4, ON UAE HISTORY, CULTURE, TRADITION
AND POLITICSAL SYSTEM, HELD FOR NEW DIPLOMATS TO THE
UAE ON JULY 3-4. ARRIVING IN THE COUNTRY. SHE STARTED
HER SESSION BY SAYING THAT HER VIEWS "MY VIEWS "DO NOT
NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE INSTITUTE'S", AN
INFREQUENTLY USED OPENING REMARK IN A SESSION THAT
TURNED OUT TO BE FRANK AND REFRESHING.THE LATEST
EDITION (JUNE 15) OF THE UAE WOMEN'S WEEKLY MAGAZINE

"ALMARA'A ALYOUM" INTERVIEWS UAE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS' DIRECTOR FOR LEGAL AFFAIRS, AHMAD AL-JARMAN, ON THE ISSUE OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN AND THE LIKELIHOOD THAT THE UAEG WILL SIGN THE JUNE 15 EDITION OF THE UAE WEEKLY WOMEN'S MAGAZINE "ALMARA'A ALYOUM" REPORTS ON A UAE GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL'S VIEWS ABOUT THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (CEDAW), ADOPTED IN 1979 BY THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

AHMAD AL-JARMAN, THE UAE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS DIRECTOR OF LEGAL AFFAIRS, IS AMONG SEVERAL ARAB OFFICIALS INTERVIEWED FOR THE ARTICLE. AL-JARMAN SAID THAT THE UAE IS CONFRONTED WITH A NUMBER OF OBSTACLES WITH REGARD TO SIGNING CEDAW. HE SAID THAT WOMEN ORGANIZATIONS DO NOT RAISE THE SUBJECT AND DO NOT WISH MFA TO DISCUSS IT EXCEPT WITH HIGHER AUTHORITIES DUE TO THE ISSUE'S SENSITIVITY. HE ADDED THAT THE UN DEVELOPMENT OFFICE IN THE UAE WOULD NOT TALK ABOUT CEDAW UNTIL AFTER IT IS SIGNED². AL-SAYEGH HAS WRITTEN SEVEN BOOKS ON THE UAE AND THE GULF AREA, AND FREQUENTLY WRITES OPINION ARTICLES FOR THE SHARJAH-BASED ARABIC DAILY "AL-KHALEEJ".. SHE HAS TRAVELED TO THE U.S. ON A FULBRIGHT PROGRAM AND HAS DONE ACADEMIC STUDIES AND RESEARCH AT THE CENTER FOR MUSLIM/CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING AT GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY. DURING HER SESSION, AL-SAYEGH TALKED ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF UAE CITIZENS, THE INFLUENCE AND POWER OF THE TRIBAL SYSTEM, THE UAE FEDERATION, ISLAM, LEADERSHIP SUCCESSION, WOMEN'S ISSUES, AND CULTURE AND TRADITIONS..

12. THE UAE HAS DELAYED SIGNING THE CEDAW, AL-JARMAN SAID, BECAUSE, LIKE OTHER ARAB ISLAMIC COUNTRIES, THE UAE HAS RESERVATIONS ABOUT CERTAIN CLAUSES IN CEDAW, SUCH AS EQUALITY BETWEEN THE TWO GENDERS IN INHERITANCE MATTERS, CHILD ADOPTION (WHICH IS PROHIBITED BY SHARI'A), AND TRANSMISSION OF CITIZENSHIP FROM A WOMAN TO HER HUSBAND AND CHILDREN, WHICH CONTRADICTS NATURALIZATION LAWS IN MANY COUNTRIES. AL-JARMAN ADDED THAT ADJUSTMENTS WOULD BE NECESSARY WITHIN THE SOCIAL SECURITY, FAMILY LAWS, AND ISLAMIC SHARI'A REGULATIONS, IN ORDER FOR THERE TO BE AGREEMENT.

13. AL SAYEGH, WHO IS FROM DUBAI, DESCRIBED THE UAE AS A "LOOSE FEDERATION" WITH EACH EMIRATE HAVING ITS OWN LAWS, ECONOMY AND FLAG (EXCEPT SHARJAH WHICH USES THE UAE UNION FLAG). SHE CRITICIZED DUBAI FOR ITS LAX IMMIGRATION LAWS AND CALLED FOR A FEDERAL IMMIGRATION LAW. DUBAI HAS DEVIATED FROM ITS CULTURE AND ROOTS, AND HAS BECOME "A SIN CITY LIKE BEIRUT BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR," SHE SAID. SHE DISCUSSED THE PROBLEMS THAT DUBAI AND ABU DHABI FACED DURING THE FIRST FIVE YEARS OF THE FEDERATION AND HOW DUBAI HAD THREATENED TO LEAVE THE FEDERATION. ASKED WHETHER THE U.S. SIGNED CEDAW, AL-JARMAN SAID THAT THE U.S. HAD SIGNED BUT NOT RATIFIED IT, SO IT IS STILL NOT BINDING. HE SAID THAT THE UAE CONSIDERS CEDAW VERY IMPORTANT AND FUNDAMENTAL TO FOR HUMAN RIGHTS. HE ADDED THAT THE UAE IS WITNESSING A MAJOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE ROLE OF WOMEN, AND NOTED THAT THE UAE, WITH THE LEADERSHIP OF THE UAE GENERAL WOMEN'S UNION, IS THE FOUNDER OF THE ARAB WOMAN ORGANIZATION IN EGYPT., THROUGH THE UAE GENERAL WOMEN'S UNION.

14. AL-SAYEGH SPOKE ABOUT HOW EACH EMIRATE OBSERVES ISLAM AND HOW SHARJAH AND RAS AL KHAIMAH OBSERVE STRICT ISLAMIC REGULATIONS BECAUSE OF THEIR PAST RELATIONS WITH THE SAUDI WAHHABIS. SHE DISCUSSED POST-9/11 OUTCOMES SUCH AS THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION'S REVISION OF ITS CURRICULUM WITH THE AIM OF ELIMINATING ANYTHING THAT ENCOURAGES INTOLERANCE AGAINST OTHER RELIGIONS. WHILE SPEAKING ABOUT RELIGION, CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS, AL-SAYEGH TRIED TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN WHAT IS CULTURAL AND WHAT IS ISLAMIC, AND MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT EACH.

15. AL-SAYEGH DESCRIBED SHEIKH ZAYED AS BEING THE

STABILIZING FACTOR OF THE FEDERATION AND NOTED THAT LEADERSHIP SUCCESSION REMAINS A CONCERN.

¶6. AL-SAYEGH SAID THAT UAE WOMEN ARE GRANTED EQUAL EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS UNDER THE UAE CONSTITUTION, BUT THEY LACK POLITICAL RIGHTS. THIS WILL START TO CHANGE IN THE FUTURE WHEN WOMEN BECOME MEMBERS OF THE FEDERAL NATIONAL COUNCIL, SHE SAID. SHE ADDED THAT UAE WOMEN ARE VIEWED BY OUTSIDERS AS "BMO'S - BLACK MOVING OBJECTS", BUT IN REALITY THEY HAVE THE POWER WITHIN THE NUCLEAR FAMILY TO RAISE THE CHILDREN, AND DISCIPLINE THE HUSBAND.

¶7. COMMENT: AL-SAYEGH, WHO SPEAKS AND WRITES ABOUT DEMOCRACY AND REFORM IN THE ARAB WORLD, IS ONE OF THE UAE WOMEN WITH THE HIGHEST PUBLIC PROFILE. SEVERAL OUTSPOKEN WOMEN IN THE UAE, WITH THE MAJORITY COMING FROM DUBAI. HER LECTURE WAS ONE INDICATION OF A SOCIETY MOVING TOWARD MORE FLEXIBILITY AND LESS CENSORSHIP OF SPEECH. HOWEVER, PRESS FREEDOM REMAINS SOMEWHAT RESTRICTED. THE THE THREE NEWSPAPERS THAT COVERED THE EVENT, ENGLISH DAILIES KHALEEJ TIMES AND GULF NEWS, AND ARABIC DAILY AL-BAYAN, EDITED OUT SEVERAL OF HER SHARPER COMMENTS, A COMMON PRACTICE IN THE UAE. APPEARED TO HAVE PRACTICED SELF-CENSORSHIP, WHICH IS COMMON IN THE UAE. NONE OF THEM MENTIONED DUBAI AS A "SIN CITY" OR UAE WOMEN AS "BMO'S".

AL- JARMAEN SAID THAT CEDAW "THIS AGREEMENT "IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT HUMAN RIGHTS TOOLS, AND THE UAE COMPLETELY SUPPORTS IT. THERE IS A STRONG CALL FROM OUR SIDE TO INCLUDE WOMEN IN THE PUBLIC, ADMINISTRATIVE, AND POLITICAL LIFE, AND THESE FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO THE NECESSITY OF US BEING MEMBERS OF THIS AGREEMENT."

¶5. AL-JARMAN SAID THAT THE UAE FACES A NUMBER OF OBSTACLES AS IT CONSIDERS WHETHER TO SIGN CEDAW. HE SAID THAT WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS HAVE NOT YET RAISED THE SUBJECT WITH MFA, PREFERRING TO DISCUSS THE ISSUE WITH HIGHER AUTHORITIES BECAUSE OF THE ISSUE'S SENSITIVITY. ALBRIGHT